



CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONFERENCE, INC.

134 FARMINGTON AVENUE

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06105-3784

MICHAEL C. CULHANE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEACON DAVID W. REYNOLDS
LEGISLATIVE LIAISON

Testimony of Michael C. Culhane
Executive Director
Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference

Public Health Committee
March 15, 2013
Legislative Office Building, Room 1D

HB 6521, *"An Act Concerning Medical Orders
for Life-Sustaining Treatment"*

The Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference (CCPAC), the public policy office of Connecticut's Catholic Bishops, would like to urge the members of the Public Health Committee to oppose HB 6521, *"An Act Concerning Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment"*.

The underlying goal of HB 6521, is to clarify the health care wishes of patients with serious, life threatening illnesses and it is laudable to use extraordinary means to keep an individual alive. However, the CCPAC does not feel that a Medical Order for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST) – herein after referred to as "Order" – is the best and morally ethical way to address this concern. This Order, which is similar to a "living will", tends to over simplify complicated medical situations, possibly leading to unethical consequences. The CCPAC instead supports the use of a Durable Power of Attorney in making the appropriate health care decisions which is currently allowed under Connecticut law. This approach allows a family member or trusted person to make medical decisions for the patient that reflects his/her wishes and the actual circumstances at the time.

An Order oversimplifies medical decision making and bears the real risk that the withholding of a treatment, as indicated on the Order, may result in the unnecessary loss of life or euthanasia. The Order form fails to adequately address the complexity of

life threatening situations. For this reason, the CCPAC supports the designation of a health care advocate through the use of a Power of Attorney, as opposed to an Order.

Catholic moral teaching related to the providing of health care services allows for the withholding or discontinuing of medical treatments under certain situations. As an example, artificial nutrition and hydration may be withheld when it cannot be reasonably expected to prolong life or be excessively burdensome to the patient. However, the decision to discontinue these treatments must be made based on the current circumstances and the medical situation of the patient. Decisions should not be made in advance of the crisis situation and/or the premature withholding or denial of services. Such decisions may result in the unnecessary and untimely death of the patient, especially if the medical problem was unrelated to the underlying illness.

HB 6521 also fails to direct the Department of Public Health to establish its pilot program that provides for patients with a terminal illness to use an Order. The bill, as written, would allow this program to apply to any individual at any time during their life.

Due to the concerns that have been raised above, the CCPAC urges this committee oppose HB 6521.

Michael C. Culhane
Executive Director
Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference